

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 05078 041446Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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SUBJECT: STUDENT OCCUPATION OF BOGOTA HOSPITAL CAUSES PRESIDENTIAL
INTERVENTION

1. SUMMARY: OCCUPATION OF A DOWNTOWN BOGOTA HOSPITAL ON MAY 27
BY NATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND MEDICAL FACULTY CALLING
FOR UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION OF THE FACILITY LED TO INTER-
VENTION OF THE ARMY AND THE FORCEABLE EXPULSION OF THE
STUDENTS. THE EXPULSION TOOK PLACE DESPITE A FORMAL AGREEMENT
BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHICH
OUTLINED A PEACEFUL SOLUTION. THE INCIDENT HAS ANGERED
VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE POPULATION AND A CONFRONTATION HAS
DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND MEDICAL COMMUNITY ON THE
ONE HAND AND VARIOUS MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT AND LAW ENFORCE-
MENT BODIES ON THE OTHER. THERE IS OVERWHELMING STUDENT AND
FACULTY SUPPORT THROUGHOUT BOGOTA FOR THE RECTOR AS THE
STANDARD-BEARER FOR THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. SIGNIFICANT
STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE ALREADY OCCURRED AND MORE
SERIOUS DISRUPTIONS COULD DEVELOP IN THE ABSENCE
OF A TIMELY SOLUTION. END SUMMARY

2. IN MID-MAY, RESIDENT DOCTORS AND INTERNS OF THE
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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 05078 041446Z

SAN JUAN DE DIOS HOPSITAL IN DOWNTOWN BOGOTA

INITIATED A SYMBOLIC OCCUPATION OF THE MEDICAL FACILITY TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR DEMAND THAT THE HOSPITAL BE REMOVED FROM ADMINISTRATION BY THE CHARITY ORGANIZATION CONTROLLED BY THE DEPARTEMENTAL GOVERNMENT OF CUNDINAMARCA AND TURNED OVER TO THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. THIS ISSUE HAS ARISEN FREQUENTLY OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS AND MOST RECENTLY HAS BEEN VIGOROUSLY PROMOTED BY THE DEAN OF MEDICINE AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. IN A SURPRISE MOVE, LARGE NUMBERS OF MEDICAL AND OTHER STUDENTS FROM THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY SEIZED THE HOSPITAL ON MAY 27 IN SUPPORT OF THE DOCTORS AND INTERNS, AND THE FACILITY CEASED OPERATIONS NECESSITATING THE EVACUATION OF PATIENTS TO OTHER HOSPITALS. WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS POLICE AND MILITARY TROOPS SURROUNDED THE AREA.

3. FOLLOWING A SERIES OF EXCHANGES, THE GOVERNOR OF CUNDINAMARCA AND THE RECTOR OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY MET AT THE HOSPITAL ON THE EVENING OF MAY 29 TO FORMALIZE AN AGREEMENT, ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES FOR THE TIME BEING, WHICH WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE UNIVERSITY MAJORITY CONTROL OVER THE HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION. AFTER THE SIGNING, THE RECTOR BEGAN TO LEAD SMALL GROUPS OF STUDENTS OUT OF THE HOSPITAL. HOWEVER, THE ABSENCE OF AN IMMEDIATE AND TOTAL EVACUATION WAS INTERPRETED BY AUTHORITIES AS A REFUSAL TO MOVE. AFTER WAITING ONLY 20 MINUTES, POLICE AND TROOPS MOVED IN TO EXPEL THE STUDENTS AND ARRESTED 350 OF THEM, ALONG WITH THE DEAN OF MEDICINE. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT DECLARED THE AGREEMENT NULL AND VOID DUE TO NON-COMPLIANCE BY THE STUDENTS. THE RECTOR OBJECTED AND CALLED FOR THE REIN-STATEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT.

4. IN THE WAKE OF THE FORCEABLE EXPULSION, THE MINISTERS OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH AND THE GOVERNOR OF CUNDINAMARCA CLOSED RANKS WITH THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT WHILE THE RECTOR STOOD FAST AS SPOKESMAN FOR THE UNIVERSITY POSITION. PRESS EDITORIALS GENERALLY FAVORED THE CHANGING OF THE HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION BUT DEPLORED THE STUDENT ACTION. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE POLICE AND ARMY ACTION HAS ANGERED THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY AND MEDICAL PERSONNEL COUNTRY WIDE. THE COLOMBIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION FORMALLY ANNOUNCED IT WOULD INVESTIGATE THE EXPULSION AND STUDENTS AT VARIOUS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BOGOTA 05078 041446Z

UNIVERSITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY ARE CALLING SYMPATHY STRIKES. THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HAS CEASED NORMAL OPERATION AND STUDENTS HAVE TAKEN TO THE STREETS TO DEMONSTRATE IN FAVOR OF THE RECTOR AND FOR THE TRANSFER OF THE HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION.

5. THE HEATED PUBLIC CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE RECTOR AND THE MINISTERS REACHED AN IMPASSE AND THE ISSUE OF WHO SHALL RUN THE HOSPITAL HAS NOW BEEN REFERRED TO PRESIDENT LOPEZ

FOR A SOLUTION. IT IS THOUGHT BY SOME THAT THE MATTER HAS REACHED SUCH SERIOUS PROPORTIONS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S INTERVENTION MAY RESULT IN THE OUSTER OF ONE OR MORE HIGH OFFICIALS, INCLUDING PERHAPS THE RECTOR. SHOULD THE RECTOR BE RELIEVED PUBLIC ORDER IN BOGOTA COULD BE SERIOUSLY DISRUPTED BY STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. RECTOR PEREZ, KNOWN FOR HIS MARXIST BELIEFS, HAS GAINED AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF POPULARITY AMONG STUDENTS AND FACULTY FOR HIS STRONG STAND ON THIS ISSUE AND IS NOW SEEN AS THE STANDARD-BEARER IN THE CONFRONTATION; WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

6. PRESIDENT LOPEZ WOULD OBVIOUSLY PREFER NOT TO PROVOKE A CONFRONTATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY. HE WILL PROBABLY SEEK TO FIND A COMPROMISE SOLUTION WHICH WOULD LEAVE PEREZ IN PLACE AND AT THE SAME TIME PROTECT THE PRESTIGE OF HIS MINISTERS AND THE GOVERNOR OF CUNDINAMARCA. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER SUCH A COMPROMISE SOLUTION IS AVAILABLE TO THE PRESIDENT.
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